

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

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AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY LONDON

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USMISSION USUN

C O N T I A L DAMASCUS 3758

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, IS, US

SUBJ: SYRIAN INTEREST IN NEGOTIATIONS

REF: DAMASCUS 3684

1. SUMMARY; SYRIAN CAMPAIGN AGAINST SINAI ACCORD CONTINUES
PIN MAJOR BLAME ON EGYPT BUT HITS USG AS WELL. MAIN THEME
IS THAT EGYPT HAS "SURRENDERED" TO ISRAEL. DEGREE OF SYRIAN
INTEREST IN FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS REMAINS UNCLEAR BUT STILL
EVIDENT, DESPITE FLAT ASSERTION BY FONMIN KHADDAM THAT SYRIA
WILL NOT NEGOTIATION. UNSPOKEN COROLLARY OF ANTI-EGYPTIAN
LINE IS THAT SYRIA WILL REFUSE NEGOTIATE JUST FOR GOLAN BUT
WILL INSIST ON LINKAGE WITH PALESTINIAN ISSUES.
SYRIA MAY SEPARATE ISSUE OF UNDOF RENEWAL FROM THAT OF
NEGOTIATIONS. END SUMMARY

2. SYRIAN TV VIEWERS HAVE BEEN TREATED FOR TWO WEEKS
NOW WITH NIGHTLY FILMS OF THOUSANDS OF THEIR FELLOW CITIZENS
CARRYING BANNERS DENOUNCING SINAI ACCORD DOWN MAIN STREETS
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OF THEIR COMMUNITIES, LED BY PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS, RE-

LIGIOUS NOTABLES AND PARTY OFFICIALS. AT END OF EACH MARCH REPRESENTATIVES OF NATIONAL AND/OR REGIONAL BAATH COMMANDS HAVE HARANGUED MARCHERS DRAWING ON NATIONAL COMMAND'S SEPTEMBER 4 STATEMENT. MARCHERS HAVE BEEN ORDERLY, ORGANIZED GROUPS OF PEASANTS, WORKERS, SCHOOL CHILDREN, HOSPITAL NURSES. ETC.

3. CRITICISMS OF EGYPT:

ABOVE "VOICES OF PUBLIC OPINON" HAVE BEEN GUIDED AND REINFORCED BY SPATE OF PRESS, RADIO AND TV EDITORIALS PRAISING ASAD'S "PRINCIPLED STAND" IN CONTRAST TO "MIS-GUIDED ACTIONS" OF EGYPTIAN LEADERSHIP. PRINCIPAL EGYPTIAN ERRORS STRESSED HAVE BEEN:

A. EGYPTIANS BROKE ARAB FRONT BY NOT WINNING EXPLICIT LINKAGE OF SINAI TO SYRIAN/PALESTINIAN ISSUES.

B. EGYPT SURRENDERED, GIVING EVERYTHING AWAY FOR NOTHING AND

C. SIGNED A BLATANTLY POLITICAL AGREEMENT.

4. CRITICISMS OF US:

USG IS CITED IN ALMOST EVERY SPEECH AND COMMENTARY. OUR ROLE IN SINAI ACCORD VARIOUSLY DESCRIBED AS TRYING ACHIEVE NEW BRIDGEHEAD IN AREA THROUGHT INTRODUCTION OF OUR TECHNICIANS; INCREASING PROSPECTS OF ANOTHER WAY BY OVERLY GENEROUS MILITARY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO ISRAEL. LANGUAGE USED AGAINST US HAS BEEN RESTRAINED. (IT IS AS IF WE ARE THE SERPENT WHOSE VERY NATURE DICTATED WE OFFER THE APPLE BUT IT WAS SADAT WHO FELL INTO ORIGINAL SIN.)

5. SYRIAN POSTURING:

REVIEW OF THE PUBLIC ACCUSATIONS AGAINST CAIRO REVEALS LARGE ELEMENT OF SYRIAN POSTURING. BEFORE SECRETARY RETURNED TO ME LAST AUGUST, SYRIA KNEW THAT (A) SINAI AGREEMENT WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BE CONCLUDED ; (B) IT WOULD BE VALID PROBABLY FOR AT LEAST THREE YEARS (HADDAM WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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ALREADY IN PRIVATE DECRYING THIS AS "THREE YEARS OF EGYPTIAN ISOLATION AND PARALYSIS") AND (C) ISRAEL WOULD RECEIVE MAJOR MILITARY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE FROM THE US. THE SHOCK AND OUTRAGE FIRST EXPRESSED IN THE SEPT 4 NATIONAL COMMAND STATEMENT OVER THESE POINTS, AND ELABORATED SINCE IN MEDIA, WAS TO LARGE DEGREE FABRICATED.

6. SYRIAN INTEREST IN NEGOTIATIONS:

ASAD HIMSELF TWICE WARNED JOURNALISTS DURING SEPTEMBER THAT NO ONE SHOULD TAKE SYRIAN INTEREST IN FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS FOR GRANTED. KHADDAM IN TYPICALLY BLUNTER FASHION REPORTEDLY MADE STATEMENT IN BEIRUT THAT SYRIA HAS NOT ASKED FOR NEGOTIATIONS AND WILL NOT NEGOTIATE. GIVEN KHADDAM'S TRACK RECORD FOR PROCLAIMING RIGID POSITIONS WHICH ARE LATER PROVED INACCURATE, AND WHICH HE HIMSELF PERHAPS ALWAYS KNEW TO BE SO, WE DO NOT TAKE HIS STATEMENTS AT FACE VALUE. (HADDAM'S POSITION HAS BEEN VARIOUSLY INTERPRETED EVEN BY HIS ARAB CONTACTS, WITHSAAB SALAM AFFIRMING KHADDAM'S EAGERNESS FOR NEGOTIATIONS AND JORDANIAN SOURCES CLAIMING THE DIRECT OPPOSITE.) PRESIDENT HIMSELF HAS REMAINED LARGELY SILENT ON THIS ISSUE EXCEPT FOR HIS INTERVIEWS WITH BBC-TV AND DE BORCHGRAVE. HIS SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVES INCLUDING KHADDAM, POLITICAL ADVISOR DAOUDI AND MUTIB SHANAN HAVE CARRIED HIS PERSONAL MESSAGES THROUGHOUT THE ARAB WORLD. WE HEAR THESE MESSAGES ARE CRITICAL OF EGYPT BUT DOUBT THAT THEY CONTAIN SPECIFIC PRESENTATION OF SYRIAN FUTURE NEGOTIATING TACTICS. MEANWHILE OUR CONTACTS AT LOWER LEVEL IN SYRIAN GOVERNMENT, MANY OF WHOM ARE PARTY MEMBERS, CONTINUE TO ASSUME SYRIAN AGREEMENT TO NEGOTIATE AND PRESUME US WILL PLAY ACTIVE ROLE.

7. PALESTINIAN-SYRIAN LINKAGE:

IF SYRIAN PROPAGANDA OF PAST WEEKS HAS ACCOMPLISHED ANYTHING IT HAS BEEN TO PAINT SYRIA ITSELF INTO CORNER THAT PUTS BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN ITSELF AND ISRAEL OUT OF THE QUESTION. STATEMENTS BY SYRIAN LEADERSHIP HAVE SERVED TO PROJECT IMAGE OF SYRIA AS SOLE DEPENDABLE DEFENDER BOTH OF PALESTINIAN CAUSE AND TRADITIONAL HARD LINE ARAB VIEWS RE ISRAEL. THE "NEGOTIATIONS" SYRIA
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REJECTS ARE "SELF-SERVING NEGOTIATIONS" WHICH WOULD PARALLEL EGYPTIAN NEGOTIATIONS OVER SINAI. THUS SYRIA WILL PROBABLY INSIST, IN WHATEVER FORA MAY EVENTUALLY BE ACCEPTED FOR TALKS, THAT IT HAVE A CLEAR PRIOR UNDERSTANDING IT WILL NEGOTIATE NOT JUST ABOUT GOLAN BUT ABOUT PALESTINIAN RIGHTS. WHETHER THE PLO WILL FORMALLY GRANT DAMASCUS THIS PRIVILEGE, WHICH IT HAS HERETOFORE DEINIED ANY SINGLE STATE, REMAINS UNCLEAR.

8. DENIAL OF SOVIET INVOLVEMENT:

SYRIAN LEADERSHIP BOTH IN PRIVATE COMMENTS AND THROUGH NEWS COMMENTARIES HAS SHOWN MARKED SENSITIVITY TO EGYPTIAN ACCUSATIONS THAT THEIR POSITION IS BEING MASTERMINDED BY USSR. SYRO-SOVIET FRIENDSHIP IS PROUDLY PROCLAIMED ON

ONE HAND BY SYRIANS BUT IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWED BY FLAT DENIALS
THAT SYRIAN CITICISMS OF EGYPT HAVE BEEN IN ANY WAY INSPIRED
MUCH LESS DIRECTED BY SOVIETS.

9. UNDOF:

WE SEE NO PRESENT REASON TO BE PESSIMISTIC ABOUT
UNDOF RENEWAL AT END OF NOVEMBER. WHILE WE UNABLE BE
CATEGORIC THAT MANDATE WILL BE RENEWED, WE RECALL ASAD
SHOWED HIMSELF IN NOVEMBER 1974 AND MAY 1975 CAPABLE
OF ISOLATING THIS ISSUE FROM OTHER AREA PROBLEMS. HE
COULD ONCE AGAIN MATTER-OF-FACTLY SANCTION UNDOF
RENEWAL WHETHER OR NOT NEW NEGOTIATIONS WERE THEN IN PROGRESS.
EVEN THOUGH CONFRONTATION WITH IRAQ MAY HAVE ABATED, REMOVING
ONE REPORTED RATIONALE FOR RENEWAL, HIS ACTION IN MAY
PRODUCED NO NEGATIVE DOMESTIC REPERCUSSIONS AND ANOTHER
RENEWAL NEED NOT EITHER.
MURPHY

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